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USAID/W FOR DCHA/OFDA FOR HAJJAR, KHANDAGLE AND MARX,
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SUBJECT: LITTLE IMPROVEMENT IN FOOD SECURITY SINCE NOVEMBER

Summary

1. A monthly monitoring report issued by the National NGO Food Security Network (FOSENET) suggests little improvement in the food security situation across the country since November, due to absolute scarcity of food. The food security situation is poised to improve among eligible WFP beneficiaries in February since food aid deliveries have improved and all implementing partners are operational. Transportation problems and a thriving black market in corn meal will ensure that other groups not eligible for international food aid will go hungry. End summary.

Little Improvement in Food Situation

2. A monthly monitoring report issued by the National NGO Food Security Network (FOSENET) suggests little improvement in the food security situation across the country due to absolute scarcity of food--this in spite of increased levels of WFP and other international food aid. The report also suggests increasing levels of politicization of Grain Marketing Board (GMB) and commercial food and profiteering in food distribution and access. Absolute scarcity surpassed cost and selective bias in access as major impediments to food security. FOSENET is a network of 24 Zimbabwean NGOs, organized in March 2002 to monitor food needs, availability, and access through NGOs based within districts, and through community based monitors.

3. This was FOSENET's fifth report. It is based upon 133 reports from 43 of Zimbabwe's 57 districts covering the period December 2002 through January 2003. The report covers fewer districts than the November version, making comparisons difficult. NGO and community monitoring were combined in this round, which led to more than one report being received from more than 60 percent of districts.

4. Overall conclusions from the report are as follows:

--Food security worsened in 27 districts, or 63 percent of responding districts, in December and January. In November, 75 percent of reporting districts reported increased food insecurity when compared to October levels. Only Nyanga in Manicaland reported increased supplies, while in nearby Mutare rural people were reported to be moving away from their homes because of hunger.

--Vulnerability dropped slightly from November with the share of districts reporting everyone in need of food decreasing from 51 percent in November to 47 percent in December/January.

--Close to half of all districts (49 percent) reported falling, erratic GMB supplies. In November, two-thirds of respondents reported falling GMB supplies. In spite of this seeming improvement in GMB supplies, the average volume of deliveries per ward declined to 1.8 tons from 3.4 tons in November and 9.3 tons in October. Matabeleland North and South and Mashonaland West have consistently reported one or more districts with no GMB deliveries over the last six months. Hurungwe in Mashonaland West and Lupane in Matabeleland North have reported wards that have not received GMB deliveries since October and July, respectively. Buhera in Manicaland and Tsholotsho in Matabeleland North, with several months of no delivery in November, did not report this round.

--Political barriers and procedural bias continued to be obstacles to accessing GMB grain. These barriers increased from 38 percent of districts in November to 62 percent in December/January. The major barrier to food access was the requirement to produce a ZANU-PF party card. To get a letter from the councilor or headman to certify residence, potential beneficiaries had to demonstrate ruling party membership or

participation in ruling party activities.

--The cost of GMB sales was a barrier to access in 10 percent of districts, less than the 22 percent in November and 38 percent in October. The upper price range for a 10-kg bag of corn meal was Z\$260, 124 percent above the controlled price.

--Reduced supply and political barriers were major reported obstacles to commercially supplied food. Political interference in commercial sales, in particular the youth militia and police controlling food queues or claiming preferential access, increased since the November report. This is most likely due to the increased scarcity of food.

--The upper price range for a 10-kg bag of corn meal on the informal market was Z\$3000 in December/January, almost 25 times the controlled price. The price differential between the official GMB price for a 10-kg bag of corn meal and the informal market price has widened from Z\$490 in July 2002 to Z\$2800 in January. Even though the value of the Zimbabwe dollar has fallen over the last seven months, this represents a significant cost escalation for poor people whose incomes have not kept pace with inflation.

--The report indicated mixed results in terms of relief supplies. Six district sites reported an increase in relief supplies, ten reported no change in supply, two (Zvimba and Chivi) reported a fall, and at least eight (Hwedza, Seke, Murewa, Goromonzi, Chikomba, Chinhoyi, Hurungwe, and Makonde) reported no supplies at all. The primary barriers to relief aid were procedural and related to households not qualifying for inclusion on beneficiary lists. At least three districts reported incidents of political bias or interference: Gutu in Masvingo, Gweru in Midlands, and Makoni in Manicaland.

Relief Food on Pace

15. World Food Program more than doubled its deliveries in January from December and is poised to distribute close to its target of 53,562 tons in February. This would see an increase in beneficiaries from 2.2 million in December to 4.3 in February. WFP anticipates all 48 WFP-designated districts will receive food assistance during February so the next FOSENET report should indicate either no change or an increase in relief food aid. The remaining nine rural districts will be covered through other pipelines, including the USG's C-SAFE program that covers seven districts.

Transportation Woes Besiege Government Deliveries

16. Deliveries of GMB supplies of corn meal are unlikely to improve in the near term because of transportation bottlenecks. The state-sponsored newspaper, The Herald, reported that the GMB was having problems bringing in shipments from seaports, Beira and Maputo in Mozambique and East London in South Africa. The GMB has blamed neighboring country rail networks, port facilities, the port operators demanding foreign currency for the transportation bottlenecks, and inadequacy and unreliability of the National Railways of Zimbabwe. More recently, the GOZ has indicated its inability to compete with foreign exchange prices paid by WFP and other international importers for limited available transport services.

17. NGOs continue to insist that the current fuel shortage has not and will not have an effect on food distributions. This is counterintuitive, particularly since most international donors contract independent truckers, who do not have consistent access to fuel, to transport food. Of greater concern to the NGOs is the shortage of spare parts.

Political Bias in Food Access

18. Since the last FOSENET report in November, both the independent and state-owned press have reported more incidents of political party members denying GMB food to select groups of people and of people profiteering.

--In Gweru, the Daily News reported the arrest and detention of a city councilor after he failed to account for the presence of 30 bags of corn meal in his home. (NOTE: Councilors nationwide have been given full responsibility to collect meal from millers for distribution. END NOTE.)

--In Mutare, the Daily News reported an investigation of the deputy mayor and a councilor (both ZANU-PF) for allegedly distributing corn meal in a non-transparent way and along political lines. The Mutare mayor, who is a relatively independent ZANU-PF figure, is leading the investigation.

--In Mashava, the Daily News reported that ZANU-PF supporters blocked food aid from going into town because they believe the councilor for the district, who is a member of MDC, is excluding ZANU-PF supporters.

--In Masvingo, a former ZANU-PF MP for Harare South was arrested for having five metric tons of corn believed to have come from the GMB under dubious circumstances.

--In Gutu, The Herald reported Deputy Minister of Youth Development, Gender, and Employment creation, Shuvai Mahofa was fined for overcharging (by Z\$2800) on corn in one of her shops. Police are also investigating 10 metric tons of corn found at a mill she owns. Earlier in the month, the manager of the Gutu GMB was charged with corruptly selling corn to one of Mahofa,s mills.

Comment

18. At first glance, the smaller proportion of districts reporting a deteriorating level of food security and no deliveries of GMB food might lead one to believe that the situation had improved significantly since November. However, a meaningful comparison between this report and the last one is difficult since this one queried ten fewer districts than the previous one. These ten districts could change the overall conclusion of the report. The seemingly improved GMB coverage is also misleading in that it does not factor in the decreased volume and frequency of deliveries. Nonetheless, the food security situation should improve over the next few months mainly because of increased food relief supplies from international donors. Unfortunately, this will only benefit those sufficiently destitute to make it onto the beneficiary rolls. Logistical constraints and political bias in distribution will limit food access of the remaining people. Too, the increased opportunities for profiteering on the parallel market will continue to reduce available GMB supplies. End Comment.
SULLIVAN